



Frequently Asked Questions About School-to-Work Transition

Q. What is School-to-Work Transition?

- A. School-to-Work Transition is a locally based education initiative that brings educators, students, business, and industry together to help young people move smoothly from their classrooms to their careers. It is a systematic approach to education that links students, schools, and work places, and prepares young people for continued education and the career of their choice.

Q. Is this totally new?

- A. The components of School-to-Work Transition—rigorous academics, career awareness and exploration, work-based learning, and postsecondary education options—are not new. School-to-Work Transition integrates these components with education reform to establish high standards for students and to connect a student's education more closely to his or her interests.

Q. Why is School-to-Work Transition so important?

- A. Many young people leave high school unprepared for the career they want to pursue. They drift from job to job for years before realizing they are trapped without further education and training. Currently, more than half the state's employers have trouble finding qualified applicants with skills needed for jobs that are now available. Today's work place demands individuals who have good basic reading, writing, communication, and math skills and who excel at solving problems, working in teams, and learning on the job. Without these skills, young people face a life of low-skill, low-paying work.

Q. Why are business and labor involved?

- A. In today's economy, the skills of its workforce are a company's major competitive advantage. No longer are Washington State companies competing only against other companies in the United States, they are competing against companies worldwide. Our best companies use the brain power of their employees to develop new products and adapt to new technologies. To meet that competition, they must have a competent, trained, and educated individuals who perform at high levels. And, labor understands that high wages can only be earned by highly skilled workers.

Q. Which students benefit most?

- A. All students will benefit. School-to-Work Transition will inspire students by exposing them to new opportunities. Students preparing for college will focus more on their studies when they see how academic courses apply to careers that interest them. Students preparing for full-time work after graduation will learn the skills and work habits needed to get started in a successful career. And students combining academics with career preparation will see the connection between school and their future. Students are more likely to stay in school when they see hope for their future.

Q. How are parents involved?

- A. School-to-Work Transition offers parents a great way to stay involved in their children's education. Typically, many parents have little involvement with their children's schools after elementary grades. As a result, they have little impact on what kinds of courses their children take in high school. Too often, students take the path of least resistance—easy courses that neither challenge them nor prepare them for advanced education or their careers. School-to-Work Transition encourages parents to take an active role in helping their children develop a plan of study that coordinates their high school studies with advanced education and their potential career interests.

Q. How does School-to-Work Transition fit in with academic preparation?

- A. School-to-Work Transition is a "connector" for students. Students cannot succeed without a strong academic foundation in basic skills such as reading, writing, communication, and math. They must have a broad range of knowledge, and they must understand and be able to apply that knowledge, regardless of their career interests. School-to-Work Transition provides the connection between academics and the world outside the classroom. This connection currently is missing for many teens.

Q. What is work-based learning?

- A. Work-based learning means that work places become active learning environments for students, consistent with their career interests. Employers provide learning experiences for students who can then develop broad, transferable, entry-level skills. Teachers work with employers, labor, and other community leaders to develop a curriculum that helps students understand the skills needed in the work place. Students actively develop projects and work in teams much like employees do in today's work place. Examples of work-based learning include visiting work sites, job shadowing or observing people at work, employee-student mentoring, and student internships.

Q. How is School-to-Work Transition funded?

- A. School-to-Work Transition is being implemented with a mix of private, local, state, and federal money. A \$27 million, five-year federal grant to assist with development and implementation of School-to-Work Transition. This funding will provide seed money—or venture capital—to help local school districts establish School-to-Work Transition initiatives and to help state partners with system building activities.

Q. Who will oversee development and implementation of a local school district's School-to-Work Transition initiative?

- A. School-to-Work Transition is designed to operate and be governed at the local and community levels through regional and community partnerships. These partners include businesses of all sizes, labor organizations, parents, educators, and other community members.

Q. What is behind School-to-Work Transition?

- A. Our education system does not work well for all students, especially those who do not decide early to prepare for a four-year college. This awareness resulted in state laws passed in 1993 that set the stage for education reform and School-to-Work Transition. In 1994, a council appointed by then-Governor Lowry made recommendations about what the state's School-to-Work Transition initiative should look like. The council, made up of parents, educators, business and labor leaders, legislators, and others, developed the framework now being implemented by local partnerships statewide.

Q. How widespread is School-to-Work Transition?

- A. About three-quarters of the state's 296 school districts—with 90 percent of the state's public school students—have established partnerships or started School-to-Work Transition initiatives. During the 1996–97 school year, these districts will receive more than \$5 million in state and federal funds to help them get started. The goal is to have these initiatives in place in all schools statewide by the year 2000. Local involvement in School-to-Work Transition is voluntary.

Q. Does the public support School-to-Work Transition?

- A. Yes. In a recent survey of adults in Washington State, 74 percent said careers and the skills necessary to succeed at work should be introduced to students before high school. Eighty-seven percent said high schools should provide career preparation to every student before they graduate. Nearly everyone, 96 percent, said an education system that includes School-to-Work Transition is “highly desirable” or “desirable.” (School-to-Work Transition was described as providing a strong academic foundation for every student; giving every student hands-on learning experience; and providing an opportunity for every student to practice what they have learned in a work-based setting.) Also, recent surveys show widespread support among students of all grade levels for job-related experience connected to their education and for School-to-Work Transition.

Q. How can I help?

- A. School-to-Work Transition needs you and your support. If you're a business owner or worker, provide opportunities for students to visit your company, to work there part-time, or “shadow” you for a day. If you are a community leader, speak out in support of changes in your school district directed to higher standards for student achievement and to community partnership. If you are an educator, work with other partners to create vibrant, relevant learning experiences for your students. If you are a parent, get involved in your children's education by helping them chart and achieve their career goals. If you are a student, take advantage of the opportunities School-to-Work Transition provides to make the connection between the classroom and your interests and future career.